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ABSTRACT

Teachers in 12 Kentucky schools were surveyed to determine their attitudes toward school based decision making (SBDM). The 228 subjects included teachers at SBDM schools as well as non-SBDM schools. A Likert scale survey instrument, designed to solicit information specific to the adopted Kentucky SBDM legislation, was administered to teachers in cluster sampled schools in which SBDM had been adopted as well as those in which SBDM had not been adopted. Frequency data were analyzed by Chi square at the .05 probability level. The data indicated that those teachers in SBDM schools tend to report more positive attitudes toward SBDM than those at non-SBDM schools. However, neither group reported negative attitudes toward this management approach. By the fall of 1996 all Kentucky schools must adopt this form of school management. Based on these data, it appears that these teachers will have little resistance to incorporating SBDM as a management approach. (Author/ND)

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Teachers' Attitudes Toward School Based Decision Making

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Abstract

Teachers in Kentucky schools were surveyed to determine their attitudes toward school based decision making (SBDM). The 228 subjects included teachers at SBDM schools as well as non-SBDM schools. The researcher developed Likert scale survey instrument was administered to teachers in cluster sampled schools in which SBDM had been adopted as well as those in which SBDM had not been adopted. Frequency data were analyzed by Chi square at the .05 probability level. The data indicated that those teachers in SBDM schools tend to report more positive attitudes toward SBDM than those at non-SBDM schools. However, neither group reported negative attitudes toward this management approach. By the Fall of 1996 all Kentucky schools must adopt this form of school management. Based on these data, it appears that these teachers will have little resistance to incorporating SBDM as a management approach.

Teachers' Attitudes Toward School Based Decision Making

> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness. (Dickens, 1859, p. 15)

The above quote from Dickens could well be applied to the increasing movement in school management toward changing from top-down to a school-based decision making (SBDM) management approach. One of the requirements associated with the massive restructuring of Kentucky's public school system--as a result of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA)--is that each school must adopt SBDM by July 1, 1996. Prior to that time, faculty may vote, by two thirds majority, to adopt SBDM. As of Fall, 1995 66 percent of Kentucky's over 1300 schools have voted to be SBDM schools. Of course, others have voted not to adopt this form of governance. The concept, according to the literature, holds tremendous promise for improving schools and improving student achievement. The literature also speaks to problems with implementation.

A review of school management literature presents resource after resource extolling the virtues of SBDM. The National Committee for Citizens in Education (1990, p. 11) reports that "our experience has lead us to conclude that a bottom-up, school-by-school approach is by far the most promising strategy for

rescuing our troubled public schools." School based management, according to the Committee, proposes a profound change in the way districts are run in that a school should not operate under decisions made by the school board or the central administration, but by the school itself. Reasons for this position are also offered:

> 1. People who are involved in making decisions tend to support those decisions. They also make better decisions if they are the ones who will be affected by them;
> 2. If the staff of the school are to be held accountable for results, they should share in making decisions about how the school should operate; and
> 3. When decisions affecting a school are made by the people responsible for the school's programs, the school can respond more effectively to the needs of its students and the community it serves (pp. 11-12).

Covey (1992), in studying correlates of SBDM, endorses the above position. He maintains that student achievement and success may be increased by giving those closest to the delivery of educational services appropriate authority for results. However, Covey cautions that this possible success must be joined with an implementation approach which includes definition of SBDM and definition of roles and responsibilities.

Midgley and Wood (1993) are others who see school-based management as making good sense, yet they report little difference between the day-to-day functioning of SBDM schools and

those not SBDM. More importantly, they also report that the education of students appears to be no better in the SBDM schools.

Barth (1991) sees extraordinary promise of school restructuring yet finds this concept already "at risk". Among the factors contributing to this risk is a lack of recognition of the need for change by teachers and administrators. He reports figures of teachers and administrators who thought 75 percent of schools were in serious trouble and in need of change; yet, less than 25 percent of the group felt their own school was in difficulty.

Wohlstetter and Odden (1992, p. 537), in a comprehensive review of the literature, come to the conclusion "that connections between student learning - the real objective of education policy - and SBM are not probed and thus not discovered." Perhaps contributing to these shortcomings are their suggestions that school-based management (a) is everywhere and nowhere, (b) comes in a variety of forms, (c) is created without clear goals or real accountability, and (d) exists in a stated district policy context that often gives mixed signals to schools. It seems that the "potential" of SBDM is unquestioned; rather, "implementation" and "effect" are not yet fully accomplished. Rather, the problems seem to arise from implementation, acceptance, and operation.

Carol Weiss (1993), in her study comparing six schools involved in SBDM and six schools not involved in SBDM, found that

becoming a SBDM school did not necessarily produce significant changes in curriculum, teacher morale, or other areas thought to be of importance to school improvement. She does report that most schools moving to SBDM are attempting to make changes; however, these were more a result of reform energies, not a cause-and-effect sequence. Weiss gives credit for much change within the schools studied to the "not-so-hidden hand of the principal, suggesting, encouraging, seeking grants, pushing" (p. 85).

SBDM may very well may be "the great hope" for improving schools; however, as Bradley and Olsen (1993) observed, reformers may have overestimated what SBDM is capable of and underestimated the amount of change needed throughout the system in order to make it work and conclude that "unless it is linked to reforms elsewhere in the system, substantial results are unlikely" (p. 14). Wohlstetter and Odden (1992 p. 543) agree and state that "policy also should include an aggressive educational change and staff development process. Teachers and administrators need to learn a wide array of complicated new knowledge and new skills in order to change the curriculum and instruction program, the school organization, and the professional norms among teachers."

Glickman (1992), suggests that those moving toward SBDM have a "collective fear" and poses the question, "What must be done over time to make the site-base change movement an enduring and sensible way to improve education?" (p. 24). The response offered by Glickman is straight forward and direct--the community

of educators must develop principles which guide decisions about how the educational enterprise is to be conducted. This may be accomplished through an educational process within the community of educators. Goldman and others (1991) studied site-based reform projects and found that successful change is possible where there is, among other conditions, a ready staff with a supportive principal and with a shared vision. Another condition found to be significant is that change must be real to the people implementing it.

Common themes running throughout these studies are as follows: (a) SBDM has tremendous potential for improving schools; (b) as of yet, with few exceptions, that potential is little realized and/or little validated; (c) realization of the potential of SBDM is predicated on involvement of those who must implement and operate SBDM; and (d) successful implementation and operation requires extensive change both at the individual and system levels. Perhaps a look at the basic concept of change would prove fruitful in attempting to understand failure of some schools to embrace SBDM.

There is a wealth of literature relating to organizational change; however, for purposes of the current endeavor the idea of attitudes toward change, as embodied in SBDM, is of primary concern. In their classic book on organizational change, Beanis, Benne, Chin, and Corey (1976) state that "the literature on change recognizes the tendencies of individuals, groups, organizations, and active societies to act so as to ward off

change" (p. 117). Primary among reasons for such resistance is fear of the unknown. At the time of legislative passage of KERA, the concept of SBDM, in Kentucky was little known and, perhaps, little understood. Another factor associated with resistance to change is the source of the change. When change derives from within the organization based on recognition of need for change, that change most typically meets much less resistance than that which is mandated from outside. The requirement for schools in Kentucky to use SBDM as the management form by 1996, while perhaps welcomed by some, must still be recognized as mandated.

With these realizations, it was decided that the schools in Kentucky provide an ideal background against which attitudes toward SBDM change might be studied. The research questions directing this study follow: (a) What are the attitudes of teachers toward SBDM? (b) Are there differences in attitudes toward SBDM between teachers in SBDM schools and teachers in non-SBDM schools?

Methodology

Cluster sampling, of Eastern Kentucky schools, was conducted and resulted in seven SBDM and five non-SBDM schools. Respondents to the study included 102 SBDM and 126 non-SBDM teachers.

A Likert scale survey instrument designed to solicit information specific to the adopted Kentucky SBDM legislation was developed. This development process included literature review and interviews with resource persons familiar with SBDM and

change. This was done in order to determine possible survey concern areas. The initial survey instrument was validated by a panel of experts and field-tested among a group of Kentucky teachers. The total instrument included 37 scale items and several questions to solicit demographic information. For purposes of this report, only the ten items relating to the questions under study are included.

Chi square analysis of the data, at the .05 probability level, was accomplished by use of the statistical package SPSS/PC+.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 provides results of subjects' agreements with the ten statements and statistical significance between the sample groups--SBDM and non-SBDM teachers. Respondents reported statistically significant differences on the first seven of the ten statements. Statement one speaks directly to support of SBDM, and the majority of all respondents agreed with the statement; however, the level of agreement was greater for the SBDM schools than for non-SBDM schools. Statement two was similar to one and was negatively stated, and responses tended to validate attitudes suggested in one with almost half of the total teachers disagreeing; however, among the non-SBDM faculty more (41 as compared to 34 percent) believed the current method to be better than SBDM. While both statements indicate overall positive attitudes toward SBDM, neither indicates total endorsement of the current or anticipated move to SBDM. In

particular, 28 percent of all teachers--41 percent of the non-SBDM teachers--indicated a preference for their current method of school management. Yet, response to item three which stated a belief in the school being able to develop an effective and successful SBDM program was positive. Of the total group, 74 percent agreed with the statement and only 13 percent disagreed. A greater percentage, 83 as compared to 67, of the SBDM school teachers agreed with the statement than did the non-SBDM teachers. Still, the majority of non-SBDM teachers were positive.

Insert Table 1 about here

Statements four and five, as does three above, speak to what the literature refers to as the potential of SBDM. Attitudes between the study groups were significantly different on item four with more optimism regarding SBDM being expressed by the SBDM group. Of all the statements, respondents agreed most with five--"I will commit myself to making SBDM work in my school". SBDM school respondents did agree at a higher proportion; however, of the total, 84 percent agreed and only eight percent expressed disagreement.

Item six, that respondents have a clear vision of what SBDM should be, was agreed to by the majority of respondents as was the companion item seven--that SBDM should provide for all areas of school management. Combining these statements indicates that

the respondents do have a vision of SBDM and also that the vision appears to be congruent, at some level, with literature on areas with which SBDM should be concerned.

The last three statements revealed no statistically significant differences between SBDM and non-SBDM school faculty. However, these statements do provide descriptive information regarding these survey concerns. In terms of teacher productivity, item eight, the respondents were almost evenly divided among the three categories. It would seem that SBDM was not viewed as being extremely influential in teaching. Similar descriptive data were found for item nine--SBDM will create conflict between teachers and administrators. Fortunately, a higher percentage of faculty disagreed with this statement than agreed and this, at least, indicates that the majority of faculty do not perceive conflict as inevitable.

The literature reviewed indicates that sufficient time is a problem when implementing SBDM, and these respondents appear to have a firm grasp on the reality of time involved. Item ten, "I believe there will be adequate time during the school day to implement SBDM", was disagreed to by 62 percent of the respondents with only 19 percent agreeing.

Conclusions

It appears that teachers in SBDM schools have more favorable attitudes toward SBDM than those teachers in non-SBDM. This study does not allow any speculation as to whether that positive attitude is a result of being a SBDM school or if an existing

positive attitude predisposed the school teachers to vote to became SBDM--the perpetual "chicken or egg" conundrum. Regardless, SBDM is associated with more positive attitudes and this suggests that the more rapidly the balance of Kentucky schools move toward SBDM, the more rapidly the potential of this management approach might be realized.

Even though there is a significant difference between the two groups on most statements, generally, both SBDM and non-SBDM teachers reported positive attitudes toward this management style. The non-SBDM teachers did report a preference for their current management style; however, this did not preclude them from reporting positive attitudes toward other aspects of SBDM. Particularly encouraging was the statement, "I will commit myself to making SBDM work in my school", with which the majority of respondents agreed and only eight percent disagreed.

Based on these data, resistance to change should not be an unsurmountable problem for those schools anticipating moving into SBDM nor should it be so for those currently attempting to make it work. Most faculty appear willing to try.

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